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HUMAN EVENTS
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The Invisible Hand

Philip Agee

The recent front-page "exposes" in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post* of "mistakes" and "misleading statements" in the State Department's White Paper on Communist interference in El Salvador closely parallel an attack on the White Paper by CIA defector Philip Agee, who was in the national news last week when the Supreme Court upheld the right of the U.S. government to deny him an American passport on grounds that he is a danger to the national security of the U.S.

In telephone interviews with HUMAN EVENTS, *Journal* reporter Jonathan Kwitny and *Post* reporter Robert Kaiser both acknowledged that they consulted a detailed 46-page critique of the White Paper by Agee before their stories were published on June 8 and June 9. They deny that they passed off any of Agee's work as their own and, in fact, don't charge, as Agee does, that some of the captured Salvadoran guerrilla documents released with the White Paper were fabricated by the CIA. But Kwitny at one point referred to the documents as "allegedly" captured.

Nevertheless, a comparison of the *Post* and *Journal* articles with the Agee paper reveals that many of the points made by Agee can be found in the stories by Kaiser and Kwitny (see box for a few examples).

Although journalists can't be faulted for pursuing leads from any source, there is absolutely no hint in the *Journal* or the *Post* that Agee had produced a massive critique of the White Paper, or that it served as a major source for Kaiser and Kwitney.

Kaiser told us that an early draft of his story mentioned Agee and other critics of the White Paper. However, his editors suggested, and Kaiser said he agreed, to drop that reference because it was lengthy and unnecessary.

In a detailed rebuttal to the *Journal* and *Post* stories released on June 17, the State Department acknowledged that the newspapers had correctly identified a "few points of misstated detail or ambiguous formulations." But the State Department said these "do not in any way change the conclusions of the report" on the Communist arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Much of the criticism, the State Department said, was "inaccurate" or "based on inaccurate information."

However, in contrast to the sensational front-page treatment accorded the critical analyses, which have been exploited by the Communists as "evidence" that U.S. policy on El Salvador is "a bunch of lies," the *Washington Post*'s brief story on the rebuttal was buried back on page 29. The *Journal* has ignored the State Department rebuttal.

Although the *Journal* and the *Post* never mentioned it in their "exposes," statements in the White Paper that Cuba played a key role in arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerrillas have been confirmed by Fidel Castro himself. According to an April 25 article in the *New York Times*, a senior West German politician recently visited Cuba "and was told by Fidel Castro that Cuba had shipped arms to insurgents in El Salvador but that the shipments had ended."

The *Times* quoted a West German party spokesman as saying, "Castro did not deny that shipments of weapons took place and in that sense confirmed the white book." The *Times* added that "...he said Mr. Castro had insisted that the shipments had ended and that the Soviet Union had not been involved."

Focusing largely on the 19 documents released by the State Department, a small portion of those that were captured, the critics of the White Paper charge that the authorship of some is really unknown, a point the State Department says is "irrelevant to the evidence" in the documents.

For example, a point made by Agee, the *Journal* and the *Post* is that the account of Salvadoran Communist party chief Shafik Handal's trip to various Communist countries in search of arms appears not to have been written by Handal, but by a Cuban or in Cuba.

In response, the State Department says the ambiguity about who wrote the report "is not material to whether Handal made the trip and the nature of the commitments received." The Salvadoran guerrillas received and stored correspondence from a number of foreign sources, the State Department says, and if the document was written by a Cuban, "it would only further reinforce the conclusion of direct Cuban involvement."